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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 60/213 of 22 December 2005. The report highlights training and capacity development activities carried out by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in 2006 and 2007. The report also addresses financial, administrative and procedural issues concerning the Institute, including the status of contributions and its financial situation, proposed reforms to its reporting structure, and the request for harmonization of submission of the reports of the Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNITAR.

With respect to the financial situation of the Institute, it is noted that voluntary contributions remain at an unacceptably low level, despite the growing need for training and capacity development and the greater number of developed countries also benefiting from UNITAR activities.

It is further noted that the Institute is under new leadership, and that a strategic reform plan has been formulated to build on UNITAR achievements, seize new opportunities and meet future challenges in the fields of training and capacity development. The goal of UNITAR is to be a centre of excellence, measured by international standards, recognized within and outside the United Nations system, for standard-setting methodologies, high-quality training and research capacity on knowledge systems. The reform plan's principal proposals, which have been approved by the UNITAR Board of Trustees, are most welcome and should be implemented in partnership with other components of the United Nations system. They are not, however, the subject of this report.

* The submission of the present document was delayed in order to incorporate the latest data provided by UNITAR.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 60/213, in which the Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed the relevance of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and reiterated that training and capacity development should be accorded a more visible and larger role in support of the management of international affairs and in the execution of the economic and social development programmes of the United Nations.

2. This report has also been prepared in the light of significant changes at UNITAR. After 15 years, the Institute is under new leadership. Carlos Lopes was appointed Executive Director of UNITAR on 1 March 2007. The goal of UNITAR is to be a centre of excellence, measured by international standards, recognized within and outside the United Nations system, for standard-setting methodologies, high-quality training and research capacity on knowledge systems. The Executive Director and his staff have developed a strategic reform plan for UNITAR, which was presented to its Board of Trustees in Geneva on 23 and 24 July 2007. Major reform proposals, endorsed by the Board, are most welcome and should be executed in partnership with other components of the United Nations system. They are based on four strategic priorities, namely: strengthening institutional capacity for training and research; enhancing human capital; building and strengthening strategic partnerships; and rationalizing the organizational structure.

3. These priorities reflect the spirit of General Assembly resolution 60/213, which, inter alia, reaffirmed the importance of a coordinated United Nations systemwide approach to research and training, the need to further develop partnerships in particular at the country level, the relevance of training-related research activities, and the need to ensure fair and equitable geographical distribution and transparency in the preparation of programmes and employment of experts. The present report does not detail these reform proposals, but rather responds to issues raised by the Assembly and provides an update of UNITAR programmatic activities.

4. To date, UNITAR is totally self-funded and does not receive any contributions from the United Nations regular budget for its activities. The level of the voluntary contributions to the General Fund, however, remains very low, putting at risk the core training programmes of the Institute.

5. In its resolution 60/213, the General Assembly renewed its appeal to all Governments, in particular those of developed countries, and to private institutions, to give the Institute their generous financial and other support, and urged the States that have interrupted their voluntary contributions to consider resuming them. In parallel, the Assembly encouraged the Board of Trustees to continue its efforts to broaden its donor base and further increase the contributions to the General Fund. It is noted, in this context that the Board of Trustees decided, in July 2007, to approach the Fifth Committee and various capitals with a view to mobilizing support for the core training programmes of the Institute.

6. The Assembly also called for expeditious resolution of the issues relating to the rent, rental rates and maintenance costs of the Institute. In section XII of its resolution 60/248, the Assembly decided to provide UNITAR with the amount of 242,400 dollars, being the equivalent of the amount of rental, maintenance and other

(b) a regional training programme to enhance conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Africa, which will be held in late 2007;

(c) the training programme to enhance the conflict prevention and peacebuilding capacities of indigenous peoples' representatives, which took place in 2006 in Morocco for French-speaking representatives of Africa, and will be held in 2007 in Australia for indigenous representatives of the Pacific; and

(d) the seminar for special and personal representatives and envoys of the United Nations Secretary-General and senior Headquarters staff, which is organized with the International Peace Academy in association with the United Nations Staff College, and will be held in October 2007 in Switzerland.

21. In 2007, UNITAR also launched a seminar series at United Nations Headquarters for the diplomatic community entitled the "Peace and Security Series". The series discusses recent developments, current challenges and emerging trends at the United Nations, including the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, new tools of the Security Council, international criminal justice and the protection of humanitarian space, the protection of children and youth in armed conflict, United Nations peacebuilding and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on the role of women in peace and conflict. The series is implemented with a number of partners, including select Governments, the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Friends of the ICC.

22. Specifically on peacekeeping, UNITAR also works closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to provide self-paced distance courses to students from 129 countries to prepare them to serve in peace support operations. Twenty courses in English, 13 in French, and 12 in Spanish are delivered through e-learning, with over 50,000 enrolments annually.

23. Further, in terms of resources, the Institute has contributed significantly to building institutional memory on lessons learned in United Nations peacemaking and preventive diplomacy.

B. Sustainable development and environment

24. The work of the Institute in the thematic area of sustainable development and environment includes: environmental governance, chemicals and waste management, climate change, and social and human development. Through customized training and workshops, preparation of national profiles, distance learning courses, knowledge-management methodologies, and information-sharing platforms, the training activities on sustainable development and environment have benefited a wide range of stakeholders, from government officials to NGOs and private sector representatives, as well as local authorities.

25. UNITAR work in this field assists countries in achieving their internationally agreed environmental and development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

Environmental governance

26. In the area of environmental decision-making, UNITAR is working with 10 countries to strengthen stakeholder engagement. In Central America, for example, it is conducting national self-assessments to gauge implementation capacities of international agreements focusing on public participation in environmental decision-making (such as principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the 1998 Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Aarhus Convention). In South Africa, a methodology to identify practical lessons learned from public participation in environmental decision-making has also been developed.

27. UNITAR also contributes to national implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, within the context of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Platform for Disaster Reduction. In 2007, UNITAR, the Strategy, the International Labour Office and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) created an inter-agency thematic group on space applications for disaster reduction. This initiative, combined with the participation of UNITAR in the newly established United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response programme, is improving access for developing countries to space technologies with a view to reducing vulnerability and preventing risks. UNITAR is currently implementing related activities in Nicaragua, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Lake Chad region and Viet Nam.

28. At the municipal or local level, UNITAR works with a network of 12 associated training centres to meet the training needs of local governments worldwide. Specifically, it has conducted 23 training activities for 854 African, Asian, Latin American and European local government officials in the area of urban services management. Recognized by United Nations partners for its contributions in this field, UNITAR was requested in 2007, by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat, to co-develop draft guidelines on access to basic services for all, to be presented to the 22nd session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council in 2009.

29. In the field of environmental law, UNITAR introduced in 2007 an online course on the basics of environmental law. Designed to accommodate around 200 participants, over 1,400 applications were received from a varied group of stakeholders, 47 per cent of whom were government officials, the majority of them from the Asia-Pacific region (36 per cent) and Africa (28 per cent). In addition, UNITAR continues to implement its annual fellowship programme on international and comparative environmental law, consisting of an intensive three-week interactive course.

Chemicals and waste management

30. The Institute implements capacity-building efforts in more than 80 developing and transition countries to protect human health and the environment from dangerous chemicals, in particular in the context of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. UNITAR currently has over 40 country-level projects, either planned, approved or ongoing, aimed at executing enabling activities related to implementation of the Strategic Approach. In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and African regions, UNITAR supports regional and national projects to implement the Globally Harmonized System for Classification and Labelling of Chemicals. In Latin America, the Institute is assisting countries in

tackling the challenges posed by mercury by creating pollutant release and transfer registers and through risk management training. In addition, UNITAR assists some 60 countries with planning and implementation-related projects for the Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions.

31. Plans for future work include collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to assist countries with the implementation of the code of conduct on the distribution and use of pesticides; closer cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on capacity-building in countries for the Chemical Weapons Convention; and cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe on capacity-building for countries addressing challenges posed by radioactive scrap metal.

Climate change

32. The Institute is also actively involved in a number of activities related to the international process on climate change. It continues to collaborate with other United Nations agencies, notably the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme in the context of technical support for the national adaptation programme of action for least developed countries. In 2006, with its project partners, UNITAR provided training and capacity development on climate change to over 350 stakeholders from 31 principally developing countries.

33. Further in terms of resources, UNITAR, with other United Nations partners, has drafted guidance documents for national teams dealing with the national adaptation programme of action. UNITAR has also developed online collaborative planning and management tools, which are now being used in over 50 countries.

Human and social development

34. The Institute also addresses broad issues of human and social development. Through regional workshops and online courses, it offers training on the legal aspects of public debt management to finance-sector officials, especially from least developed countries and heavily indebted poor countries. In 2007, UNITAR had amassed over 500 hours of training content in this field, drawing both from international and regional expertise.

35. In 2006, UNITAR established a field office in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. A memorandum of agreement was signed with the Niger Delta Development Commission and six of the nine states of the Niger Delta. A five-year capacity development programme for local and regional governments of the Niger Delta has been designed, covering issues such as negotiation and conflict resolution; governance and local administration management; economic and social development planning; environmental protection and compliance; and assessment and monitoring. Implementation started in mid-2006, and more than 400 beneficiaries have thus far received training.

36. Further, at the local level, UNITAR also provides training in fields relating to human and social development. For instance, in 2006-2007, it organized three workshops on strengthening urban security benefiting some 72 participants from the Euro-Mediterranean region and Latin America. Also, through its capacity-building programme for local authorities in the occupied Palestinian territories, 90 local

officials have benefited from leadership and management skills training geared towards strengthening good governance practices.

C. Information and communication technologies

37. The activities of the Institute in the area of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are varied, and range from support to local initiatives, to policy-focused seminars to increase awareness of the links between ICTs and development, to the use of satellite imagery tools to bridge the digital divide. To maximize the reach of its work, UNITAR employs a number of innovative methodologies; it offers e-learning strategies and blended learning approaches; webcasts its policy seminars; and utilizes social networking and other Web 2.0 tools. Beneficiaries range from local actors to national representatives to high-level members of the diplomatic community.

38. UNITAR ICT for development activities support achieving the objectives resulting from the World Summit on the Information Society, as outlined in the Geneva Plan of Action (2003) and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (2005).

39. In 2006, UNITAR launched a web seminar series at United Nations Headquarters for the diplomatic community entitled "ICTs, issues for development". The series provides a forum for critical thinking on how ICTs can further the United Nations development agenda, with specific focus on the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society. Topics covered in 2006 included broadband deployment in developing countries, e-government strategies, technology leadership, information security and Free Open Source Software (FOSS). In 2007, it looked at ICTs and gender, indigenous rights and youth during or in preparation for the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Global Forum on Youth and ICT for Development, respectively. Key outcomes from each event have contributed directly to the work of each forum and emphasize the strategic role of ongoing UNITAR training on ICT policy issues.

40. Also in 2006 at the local level, UNITAR hosted a digital local agenda awareness-raising workshop as a follow-up to the Second World Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society (Bilbao Summit), which UNITAR had organized with local partners in Bilbao, Spain, in November 2005, a week prior to the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia. Seven workshops along the same lines were conducted in 2006-2007, through which 141 beneficiaries received training on how to develop digital local agendas at the local level. The workshops promoted the exchange of e-governance good practices among local authorities.

41. Finally, as part of UNITAR research on technology-driven knowledge systems, UNITAR collaborates with the European Organization for Nuclear Research and the European Satellite Operators Association in the areas of satellite telecommunications and integrated mobile systems. Among others, UNITAR and its partners are exploring ways to decrease the digital divide by bringing high speed Internet connectivity to remote and rural areas in developing countries.

III. Status of contributions and financial situation of the Institute

42. The funding of the UNITAR special purpose grant programmes continues to increase satisfactorily; however, the non-earmarked voluntary contributions to the General Fund remain low.

43. In accordance with the financial report for the biennium 2004-2005 transmitted to the Board of Auditors, the total income increased by 75 per cent relative to the income from the previous biennium, from $16,602,541 to $29,135,555. This dramatic increase was owed to the expansion of the special purpose grants funds with increased contributions from Governments and the private sector. Correspondingly, total expenditure increased by 47 per cent from $15,351,787 in 2003 to $22,524,873. Total reserves and fund balances as at 31 December 2005 increased to $12,816,534, from $6,624,062 at the end of the previous biennium. As projects are funded in advance, this reserve is principally earmarked for specific projects.

44. In accordance with the interim financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2006, the overall income showed a decline of 8 per cent, from $13,316,459 in 2004 to $12,273,028 in 2006. Expenditure in fact increased by 30 per cent, from $10,367,714 in 2004 to $13,469,811 in 2006. This situation is explained by the fact that reserves were built up from contributions paid in advance and projects were implemented in 2006 using funds that were paid in 2005.

45. At 31 December 2006 the reserves and fund balance was $9,358,131, in comparison to $9,700,437 in 2004.

IV. Recommendations

46. In line with its objective to be a centre of excellence in its field, UNITAR should concentrate its efforts on strengthening its ability to deliver capacity development activities, including through training, knowledge-sharing, and research on knowledge systems. The strategic reform plan developed by UNITAR, a bold and welcomed proposal, should receive full support from other components of the United Nations system.

47. Among others, UNITAR will require material support as it implements these reforms and in the conduct of future activities. As a first priority, the Fifth Committee should reconsider the issue of financing UNITAR core training activities from the United Nations regular budget. In parallel, Member States should commit to increasing or resuming their contributions to the Institute.

48. Member States should consider positively the proposals to submit the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council rather than to the General Assembly (see para. 9 above) and to harmonize the submission of the reports of the Secretary-General and the Executive Director (see para. 10 above).